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Response to Office Action Dated September 18, 2006

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IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A system for stabilizing a spine, comprising:

a first threaded member configured to couple to a first bone during use;  
a second threaded member configured to couple to a second bone during use;  
a first flexible member configured to couple to the first threaded member during use;  
a second flexible member configured to couple to the second threaded member during

use; and

a coupling mechanism,

wherein the first flexible member and the second flexible member are guides for positioning ~~[[a]]~~ the coupling mechanism at a desired position relative to the first threaded member and the second threaded member.

2. (Currently amended) The system of claim 1, ~~further comprising the coupling mechanism,~~ wherein the coupling mechanism is configured to couple the first threaded member to the second threaded member during use.

3. (Currently amended) The system of claim 1, ~~further comprising the coupling mechanism,~~ wherein the coupling mechanism is positionable using the first flexible member and the second flexible member during use, and wherein the coupling mechanism is configured to couple the first threaded member to the second flexible member during use.

4. (Currently amended) The system of claim 1, ~~further comprising the coupling mechanism,~~ wherein the coupling mechanism comprises:

a first ring configured to engage a portion of the first threaded member during use; and  
a second ring configured to engage a portion of the second threaded member during use.

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5. (Currently amended) The system of claim 1, ~~further comprising the coupling mechanism,~~ wherein the coupling mechanism comprises a ring configured to engage a portion of the first threaded member or the second threaded member during use.

6. (Currently amended) The system of claim 1, ~~further comprising the coupling mechanism,~~ wherein the coupling mechanism comprises:

- a first ring comprising protrusions configured to engage protrusions on a head of the first threaded member during use; and

- a second ring comprising protrusions configured to engage protrusions on a head of the second threaded member during use.

7. (Currently amended) The system of claim 1, ~~further comprising the coupling mechanism,~~ wherein the coupling mechanism comprises:

- a first connector configured to engage the first threaded member positioned in bone;

- a second connector configured to engage the second threaded member positioned in bone;

and

- an elongated section configured to couple the first connector to the second connector.

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8. (Currently amended) A system for stabilizing a spine, comprising:

a first threaded member comprising an inner conduit and configured to couple to a first vertebra during use;

a second threaded member configured to couple to a second vertebra during use;

a flexible member adapted for removable attachment to the first threaded member to position one or more additional components proximate to the first threaded member during use;  
and

a coupling mechanism comprising:

a first connector configured to engage a portion of the first threaded member during use;

a second connector configured to engage a portion of the second threaded member during use; and

an elongated member configured to couple to the first connector and the second connector such that the first vertebra is coupled to the second vertebra; and

~~wherein at least one of the threaded members comprises an inner conduit configured to couple to a flexible member during use.~~

9. (Currently amended) The system of claim 8, further comprising one or more guiding mechanisms including the flexible member configured to position the coupling mechanism proximate the first threaded member and the second threaded member through an opening in soft tissue during use.

10. (Original) The system of claim 8, wherein at least one of the connectors comprises a curvate wall to engage a portion of a ring during use.

11. (Currently amended) The system of claim 8, wherein the inner conduit of the first threaded member comprises a threading, and wherein the threading is configured to engage threading of ~~[[a]]~~ the flexible member.

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12. (Original) The system of claim 8, further comprising:  
a ring configured to couple at least one of the threaded members to at least one of the connectors during use; and  
wherein at least one of the connectors is configured to frictionally lock the ring.
13. (Withdrawn) A method of stabilizing vertebrae, comprising:  
coupling a first member of a stabilization system to a first vertebra; and  
moving a separating member from the first vertebra to a second vertebra through soft tissue to separate the soft tissue substantially on a plane between the first vertebra and the second vertebra without severing the soft tissue.
14. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 13, wherein the separating member comprises a needle.
15. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 13, further comprising coupling a second member of the spinal stabilization system to the second vertebra, and providing a coupling mechanism to connect the first member to the second member.
16. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 15, further comprising forming an opening through soft tissue to allow access to the first vertebra, wherein the opening is less than about 4 cm in length at a surface of the skin.
17. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 15, further comprising coupling a first flexible member to the first member, coupling a second flexible member to the second member, and guiding the coupling mechanism toward the first member and the second member using the first flexible member and the second flexible member.
18. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 15, further comprising adjusting a length between connectors of the coupling mechanism.

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19. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 15, further comprising adjusting a length between connectors of the coupling mechanism, and setting the length between the connectors by shearing off a head of a setscrew.

20. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 15, further comprising positioning the coupling mechanism using a first guide coupled to the first member and a second guide coupled to the second member, and removing the first guide from the first member and the second guide from the second member.

21. (Currently amended) A flexible member for a spinal stabilization system, comprising:  
a first section comprising a first stiffness;  
a second section comprising a second stiffness and adapted for removable attachment to a head portion of a bone screw; and  
wherein the stiffness of the second section is greater than the stiffness of the first section.

Claims 22-31 cancelled.

32. (Currently amended) A system for stabilizing a spine, comprising:  
a first threaded member configured to couple to a first portion of bone during use;  
a second threaded member configured to couple to a second portion of bone during use;  
a first flexible member configured to couple to a head portion of the first threaded member; and  
a second flexible member configured to couple to a head portion of the second threaded member during use.

33. (Original) The system of claim 32, further comprising a coupling mechanism configured to couple the first threaded member to the second threaded member during use.

34. (Original) The system of claim 32, further comprising a coupling mechanism positionable using the first flexible member and the second flexible member during use, and wherein the

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coupling mechanism is configured to couple the first threaded member to the second threaded member during use.

35. (Original) The system of claim 32, further comprising a coupling mechanism comprising:  
a first ring configured to engage a portion of the first threaded member during use; and  
a second ring configured to engage a portion of the second threaded member during use.
36. (Original) The system of claim 32, wherein at least one of the flexible members comprises a cable.
37. (Original) The system of claim 32, wherein at least one of the flexible members comprises a variable thickness cable.
38. (Original) The system of claim 32, wherein at least one of the flexible members comprises a stopping mechanism.
39. (Original) The system of claim 32, further comprising a coupling mechanism comprising:  
a first connector configured to engage the first threaded member positioned in bone;  
a second connector configured to engage the second threaded member positioned in bone;  
and  
an elongated section configured to couple the first connecting section to the second connecting section.
40. (Original) The system of claim 32, further comprising a coupling mechanism comprising at least one connector configured to engage a threaded member during use.
41. (Original) The system of claim 32, wherein the first flexible member is positionable through the first threaded member opening in a coupling mechanism during use.
42. (Original) The system of claim 32, wherein the first flexible member is positionable through the first threaded member opening in a coupling mechanism during use, and wherein the second

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flexible member is positionable through a second threaded member opening in the coupling mechanism during use.

43. (Original) A bone stabilization system, comprising:

- a threaded member comprising one or more protrusions on a head of the threaded member,

- a ring configured to engage protrusions on the head of the threaded member during use;

and

- a coupling mechanism configured to engage the threaded member during use comprising:

- an opening through a connector configured to engage the threaded member during use;

- a locking mechanism configured to couple the threaded member to the ring during use; and

wherein the system is configured such that interaction of protrusions on the head of the threaded member and the ring inhibits rotation of the threaded member in the bone during use.

Claims 44-50 cancelled.

51. (Original) A ring configured to couple a threaded member to a coupling mechanism during use, comprising:

- a first surface configured to engage a wall of the coupling mechanism during use;

- a second surface configured to engage a locking mechanism during use; and

- a third surface comprising one or more teeth configured to engage a portion of the threaded member during use such that rotational movement of the threaded member in bone during use is inhibited.

Claims 52-64 cancelled.

65. (Withdrawn) A method of stabilizing a spine, comprising:

- coupling a first threaded member to a first vertebra;

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establishing a plane of separated tissue between the first vertebra and a second vertebra;  
and  
coupling a second threaded member to the second vertebra.

66. (Withdrawn) A method of stabilizing a spine, comprising:  
accessing a first portion of the spine through an opening in soft tissue;  
coupling a first threaded member of a spine stabilization system to the first portion of the spine;  
establishing a plane of separated tissue between the first portion of the spine and a second portion of the spine;  
accessing the second portion of the spine through the plane of separated tissue;  
coupling a second threaded member of the spine stabilization system to the second portion of the spine;  
providing a coupling mechanism of the spinal stabilization system to the plane of separated tissue;  
coupling a first section of the coupling mechanism to the first portion of the spine; and  
coupling a second section of the coupling mechanism to the second portion of the spine.

Claims 67-69 are cancelled.

70. (Withdrawn) A method of stabilizing a spine, comprising:  
accessing a portion of the spine through an opening in soft tissue;  
coupling a flexible member to a first vertebra in the portion of the spine;  
coupling a second flexible member to a second vertebra in the portion of the spine;  
positioning a coupling mechanism proximate the first vertebra and the second vertebra using a first guide mechanism and a second guide mechanism;  
coupling a first section of the coupling mechanism to the first vertebra; and  
coupling a second section of the coupling mechanism to the second vertebra.